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## A SURVEY OF DRUG USE AND ATTITUDES TOWARD DRUGS AMONG MALE LAW STUDENTS AND POLICE TRAINEES IN QUEENSLAND, AUSTRALIA: A RESEARCH NOTE

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### ABSTRACT

*During first semester 1980, 96 first and last year male police students and 166 law students were surveyed about their drug use patterns and attitudes towards alcohol. Of these students, 69.3 percent drank at least once a month, 80.7 percent used coffee or tea. 23.6 percent analgesics, 3 percent antihistamines and marijuana and less than 1 percent sedatives, tranquilizers, stimulants, hallucinogens, cocaine or opiates once a month or more. Law students used caffeine and marijuana significantly in more frequently than police students. On the whole, there were in more similarities than differences between the two groups in terms of drug consumption. In terms, of attitudes, police students felt significantly more than law students that alcoholism was caused by moral weakness and medical illness as shown in the "Attitude Towards Alcoholism" questionnaire. But significantly more police students (82 percent) than law students (37 percent) felt that it was important to have drug and alcohol education a part of their course of study. Also significantly more police students (58 percent) than law students (24 percent) felt that they were prepared to manage drug or alcohol problems professionally.*

Over the last decade in Australia a number of Royal Commission reports and parliamentary inquiries have pointed to alcohol as the major drug of abuse in Australia and have called for the adoption of therapeutic rather than punitive measures in dealing with drug abuse (SSCSW, 1979). In spite of recommendations contained in these reports it appears for the present, as well as for the foreseeable future, that the police,

and legal professions, through the courts, will continue to mediate a major part of society's response to those individuals involved in illicit drug use and alcohol abuse. Police and lawyers in their professional roles frequently confront situations stemming from excessive use of alcohol and other drug abuse. Their personal perceptions of "the drug problem" will reflect societal responses on both an individual and a general level. As stated in the report of the Australian Senate Standing Committee on Social Welfare in 1977, "the 'drug problem' problem" is at the root of much of the confusion and misinformation that hinders development of a coherent rational policy directed to the total problem of society's misuse of drugs (SSCSW, 1979). To the extent that the attitudes of police and lawyers contributed to the definition of that "problem" their influence in this area is of crucial importance.

Quite apart from the well documented implication of alcohol in a major proportion of violent crime (Goodman, 1977) and motor vehicle accidents (ALRC, 1976), public drunkenness offenses themselves account for a large proportion of the offenses for which arrests are made each year in Australia.<sup>2</sup> A further aspect of the importance of the role of the police and courts in the area of alcohol abuse arises from the disproportionately heavy impact of the criminal justice system on aboriginal populations, where the socially disruptive effect of the drug has reached critical proportions.<sup>3</sup>

While the lawyer's role in the area of drug and alcohol abuse is often less dramatic and less visible than that of the police officer, it remains influential nonetheless. Whether as agents of legislative change, or in the formulation of policy, as members of the higher judiciary or magistracy, in legal aid bureaus or merely engaging in the day to day affairs of legal practice, the lawyer, along with health professionals, is in the vanguard of the social response to drug abuse.<sup>4</sup> In view of the dearth of available information about drug use and attitudes among tertiary and post-secondary students in Australia and more particularly because of the already mentioned important and often complementary role of police and lawyers in confronting drug problems, it was felt that it would be useful to look specifically at patterns of drug usage and related attitudes among student members of these two groups.

The present study which focuses upon police trainees and university law students in Queensland forms part of a larger survey designed by the first author to investigate the use of and attitudes toward a range of licit and illicit drugs, including alcohol and marijuana as well as minor analgesics, prescription drugs, opiates and cocaine, among a sample population of student helping professionals. (Engs, 1980; Engs, 1982).

### *Extent of Alcohol and Illicit Drug Use in Australia*

A study by Krupinski and Stoller (1973) in Melbourne revealed an 88.7 percent use rate of alcohol amongst males between 13 and 23 years old. Encel et al. (1972) in Sydney reported a rate of 91 percent among a population of adult males, and Hennesy *et al.* (1973) in Canberra among a similar group reported a rate of 94 percent. These fortify the conclusion of Healy (1975) who, in analyzing and reporting on psychotropic drug use, found that alcohol was the most widely and frequently used drug in Australia and that its use was steadily increasing over time. A study by Brown (1977) reported current alcohol use by about 95 percent of university law students in Sydney.

Hasleton (1971) in a survey of Arts and Science students at Sydney University found 18 percent who had ever used and 12.5 percent who were current users of marijuana. Krupinski and Stoller (1973) found 23 percent of tertiary students in their sample who had ever used the drug, while 17.1 percent were current users. Turner and McClure (1975) found that among a sample of final year high school students in Queensland, 17.6 percent had used marijuana. Between 1971 and 1973, Bell et al. (1975) surveyed over 15,000 high school students and found a progressive increase in current usage among final year students rising from 7 percent to 13.5 percent and indications that usage rates had not reached the plateau stage.

Healy (1975) in her analysis of Australian studies on drug use found that between 1.2 percent and 8.9 percent of persons under 30 years of age had used hallucinogens and between 1.6 percent and 4.5 percent were current users. The percentage of those who were currently using narcotics among Bell's (1975) study of final year high school students in New South Wales was 0.2 percent. When the rate of usage of the illicit narcotics and hallucinogens is compared to that for alcohol even among these younger 'at risk' groups of the population,<sup>5</sup> the paradoxical reality of "the drug problem" is apparent. It is in this context that the usage and attitudes of student lawyers and police trainees were investigated.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Sample Selection*

All first and final year students at the University of Queensland Law School and at the Queensland Police Academy were asked to participate in this study.<sup>6</sup>

Before administration of the questionnaire, procedures used to safeguard students anonymity and the fact that participation was voluntary were discussed. From the total possible number of students, 21 law students (9 percent) either did not wish to participate in the study or returned questionnaires with obvious faked responses, e.g., filling in 99 bottles of beer, spirits, etc., for daily consumption. All police students completed the questionnaire. The final sample included 166 law students and

96 police students. Of the total sample of 262, 42.4 percent were in their first and 57.6 percent were in their final year of the course. Religion was considered important to 46.7 percent of the sample and not important to 53.3 percent. The mean age of the total group was 20.4, 21.6 for the law students and 18.1 for the police students.

### *The Questionnaire*

The questionnaire was compiled based on World Health Organization recommendations for standardization in research on drugs and alcohol (WHO, 1976). Details concerning the reliability are discussed in another report from this same study (Engs, 1980).

### *Attitude Questions*

Attitudes towards alcoholism including etiology and treatment approaches were determined using the Attitudes Towards Alcoholism (ATA) questionnaire (Tolor and Tamerin, 1975). It has 24 items which are divided into six independent scales. It is easy to administer and has been used in previous studies with helping professionals (Berger-Gross, 1979). The scales include: *Psychological Etiology*, which refers to statements that embrace the notion that the cause of alcoholism is psychological; *Physical-Genetic Etiology*, which applies to statements concerning the idea that alcoholism has physical or inherited causes; *Moral Weakness*, which consists of assertions embracing the view that the alcoholic has weak moral character; *Medical Illness*, which refers to propositions articulating the notion that the alcoholic is sick and that alcoholism can be treated as an illness; *Humanism*, which contains assertions supporting a kind, fair and humanistic treatment of the alcoholic; and *Social Rejection*, which refers to statements that support the view that the alcoholic should be avoided or rejected. The higher the score on a particular scale the more the individual agrees with the concept. The scales are only minimally related to sex, age and education of the respondent according to the authors.

Four attitude items were developed to assess how strongly students felt about the ability to manage, treat, or teach in the area of alcohol and drug abuse and how strongly they felt that the area of alcohol and drug education and information was important for their field of study. The student responded to the statement on a four-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly agree" with a value of 1 to "strongly disagree" with a value of 4.

### *The Quantification of Substance Use*

The assessment and quantification of the amount of alcohol, caffeine in coffee and tea, cigarettes, and over-the-counter pain medication used

were adapted from the techniques suggested by Khavari and Farber (1978) and discussed in detail in another report (Engs. 1982). For examining possible problem substance use, over 60 grams of absolute alcohol per day (about six drinks) is considered to be "heavy" or "at risk" drinking. The consumption of over 750 mg of caffeine (about six cups of coffee) is considered to have possible health consequences. Over two nonprescription analgesics per day and over ten cigarettes per day are considered to increase the chances of illness and would be considered to be "at risk" usage of these substances. (WHO, 1976; Goodman and Gilman, 1975; and Healey, 1978).

## RESULTS

### *Alcohol*

Alcohol was the drug used most often by this sample (Table 1) with 90 percent of students drinking more than once a year, 69.3 percent drinking at least once a month and 46.3 percent at least once a week. Law students drank more but not significantly ( $t = 1.86$ ,  $df=227$ ,  $p=.06$ ) more alcohol per day than police students (30.8 versus 20.4 gms/day). More law students (10.8 percent) were "at risk" drinkers (over 60 gms/day absolute alcohol) than police students (6.1 percent) but the difference was not significant between the groups. There also was no significant difference in their frequency of consumption of alcohol. The Law students sample drank slightly more than males generally in Australia (28.1 gms/day) and Queensland (29 gms/day). They also drank in excess of the national mean of 21 gms/ day. The police cadets were below the national and Queensland means for males (Healy, 1978). There was no significant change in either frequency or quantity of alcohol consumed between first or final year students or between those who considered religion important in their lives compared to those who did not.

The rate of current usage of alcohol for police trainees appears to be similar to the reports by Krupinski and Stoller (1977) for the general population of tertiary students (90.6 percent) and the rate for law students with that reported by Brown (1977) in his study of law students (92.8 percent) in Sydney. The lack of difference due to religious commitment appears, however, to be contrary to other studies which have reported that this is a very important variable for predicting alcohol and other drug use (Murty, 1979; Wechsler and McFadden 1979; Engs, 1978). This is also true for year in school (Singh and Singh, 1979; Engs, 1977).

A factor which might considerably influence the police trainees consumption figures is that they were only marginally above the legally recognized age limit for "public drinking." This taken together with their probationary status in a highly disciplined career setting might encourage inhibition of alcohol consumption.

### *Other Drugs*

Other than for the consumption of caffeine in coffee or tea, analgesics, and marijuana, there was no significant difference between the use of any substances for the police and law students (see Table 1). After alcohol, caffeine was the most frequently consumed drug. It was consumed on a monthly basis by 80.7 percent, on a weekly basis by 69.9 percent, and on a daily basis by 39.6 percent of the total group. Of the law students, significantly more ( $\chi^2 = 19.4$ ,  $df = 7$ ,  $p < .01$ ) consumed caffeine on a daily (48.2 percent) and weekly (76.3 percent) basis as compared to police students (25.0 percent and 59.4 percent, respectively). Law students also consumed a significantly higher ( $t = 3.8$ ,  $df = 227$ ,  $p < .001$ ) quantity of caffeine on a daily basis as compared to police students (317 versus 181 mgs/day). No significant difference in consumption due to either religious commitment or year in school was found. Perhaps law students sit in libraries and are in study situations more frequently, which could lead to higher consumption.

On a yearly basis, nonprescription analgesics were used by most of the students (Table 1). They were also used by 28 percent of the group on a weekly basis. Significantly more ( $t = 3.01$ ,  $df = 139$ ,  $p < .01$ ) law students consumed higher amounts of analgesics per day (38.9 versus 16.9) than police trainees, though there was no significant difference in their frequency of use. Other studies in Australia have also shown that there is a high consumption of nonprescription analgesics in Australia and that use increases with age (Murray, 1980). Less than 4 percent had used antihistamines, sedatives, or tranquilizers once a month or more.

Cigarettes were consumed on a daily basis by 16.1 percent of the group, and 13.3 percent consumed over ten cigarettes a day which is considered to be harmful to health. Contrary to other studies there was no significant difference in consumption patterns of cigarettes due to importance of religion.

Marijuana is the most commonly used illicit drug. A significant ( $\chi^2 = 23.1$ ,  $df = 5$ ,  $p < .001$ ) difference between police trainees and law students in usage patterns was revealed. Only 6.3 percent of police trainees had experimented with marijuana in the year preceding the study; this percent for law students was much higher (31.7 percent). Only 2.1 percent of police trainees admitted to current usage of the marijuana while among law students this figure was 16.3 percent. The law students high usage of marijuana supports a study by Brown (1977) which also shows that a high number (49 percent) of law students had used the substance.

The low level of marijuana use among police students is perhaps due to peer group influences (Murty, 1979) or the fact that they are more "law abiding" as a group. Other explanations might be their lower age and the rigors of discipline inherent in the dormitory-based, institutional life style of the police sample.

However, their usage is much lower even than that reported for final year high school students in Queensland (Turner and McClure, 1975). The result of pre-induction screenings might also be a factor.

There was a significant difference ( $\chi^2 = 17.6$ ,  $df = 7$ ,  $p < .05$ ) in frequency of use due to importance of religion, with 30.7 percent of the not religious group and 18.4 percent of the very religious group using marijuana at least once and 6.6 percent of the not religious and 2.5 percent of the religious group using it on a monthly basis. This is in accordance with other studies which indicate that religious commitment is important in drug-taking behaviors (Murty, 1979).

Of the other illicit drugs, 6.1 percent of students had tried hallucinogens and 2.1 percent used them more than once during the preceding 12-month period. Less than 3 percent had used cocaine or opiates, which is similar to results obtained from other studies in Australia (Healy, 1978). On the whole it appears that usage of alcohol by law and police students was about the same as for tertiary aged students in other parts of Australia and that police students used marijuana much less than the law students or than students surveyed in other studies (Healy, 1975).

### *Attitudes toward Alcoholism*

Table 2 shows the results of the attitude scores of the sample. First year students have significantly higher scores ( $t = 4.5$ ,  $df = 232$ ,  $p < .001$ ), ascribing alcoholism to physical/genetic causes, while final year students have significantly ( $t = 2.00$ ,  $df = 207$ ,  $p < .05$ ) higher scores on the humanitarian scale. Several studies have indicated fewer humanitarian feelings on the part of pre-professional students as they advance through their schooling in contrast to the results of this study, which indicates more positive humanitarian feelings (Ferneau and Gertler, 1971; Eron, 1958).

When the factor of religious commitment is examined in Table 2, students who consider religion important scored significantly higher ( $t = 2.3$ ,  $df = 246$ ,  $p < .05$ ) on the social rejection scale and on the scale which indicates that alcoholism is caused by physical and genetic factors ( $t = 4.1$ ,  $df = 235$ ,  $p < .05$ ). They also scored higher on the moral weakness ( $t = 2.3$ ,  $df = 246$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and medical illness scales ( $t = 4.7$ ,  $df = 240$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Those who did not consider religion important had higher scores on the humanitarian scale ( $t = 2.47$ ,  $df = 142$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

When police and law students are compared, the police students have higher scores on moral weakness ( $t = 2.07$ ,  $df = 189$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and medical illness ( $t = -2.6$ ,  $df = 210$ ,  $p < .05$ ).



### *Attitudes toward Alcohol Education*

Table 3 summarizes attitudes toward drug and alcohol education and preparedness to deal with drug and alcohol induced problems. Final-year students felt that alcohol education was less important than did first year students ( $\chi^2 = 9.8$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < .05$ ). They also felt less ( $\chi^2 = 5.9$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < .05$ ) prepared to manage alcohol and drug problems compared to first-year students. Perhaps negative alcohol-related legal incidents precipitated these attitudes, making them feel that alcohol education was useless in dealing with difficult situations relating to alcohol which they had encountered. There was no significant difference due to religious commitment on any of these items. The law students seemed particularly pessimistic in their attitudes with barely more than one third viewing alcohol education as of importance and less than one-fifth indicating preparedness to manage alcohol-related problems. In a comparison of both groups, the police rated significantly higher ( $p < .001$ ) on all scales than did the law students with more than twice the percentage of police trainees exhibiting positive attitudes in each of these areas. Perhaps police trainees are more familiar with alcohol-related legal issues which increased their concern, while law students still had little actual experience with alcohol-related legal problems.

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The heavy use of alcohol and very low incidence of appreciation of the importance of alcohol education among law students was probably the most outstanding result of the study, along with an increased negative attitude of final year students compared to beginning students. This would suggest that increased educational efforts among forensic students should be undertaken to familiarize them with the nature of alcohol abuse and alcoholism.

The rate of alcohol use by law and police students appears to be similar to rates reported in other studies of tertiary students. However, law students consumed more caffeine and analgesics and used marijuana more frequently than the police cadets. This also suggests more education for law students on the effects of drugs and further research concerning the reasons for different consumption patterns between these groups.

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## NOTES

1. Media amplification of "hard line" police attitudes influencing public responses to the drug problem is illustrated in R. Tomasic, "Drugs Alcohol and Community Control." Law Foundation, Sydney. 1977, 26-40.
2. Such offenses constitute approximately one-third of all offenses for which arrests are made each year. Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Law and Order* 1976-78: Ct. No. 4501.3. Brisbane. 1978.
3. A survey by M. Kamien of aborigines in an Australian rural town indicated 53.2 percent of males drank in excess of 80 gms/day of alcohol. Conflict with police occurred with 50.3 percent of males over 15 years. M. Kamien, "Aborigines and Alcohol Intake," *Medical Journal of Australia* I (1975):291-298.
4. Tomasic.
5. Approximately 82 percent of all drug offenders dealt with officially are in the 17-25 years age group. *Drug Abuse in Australia A Statistical Survey: Technical Report No. 8*. Commonwealth Police. Canberra, 1976, 11.
6. Only male students were used as there were no female students among the police trainees. Also, no significant differences were found between male and female law students on the attitude questions. Males, however, drank alcohol and smoked marijuana more frequently and in greater quantity than females, as has been found in other studies of this age group.

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TABLE 1: COMPARISON OF POLICE AND LAW  
STUDENTS ON USAGE OF VARIOUS  
SUBSTANCES

	Percentage who have used once a or more			Percentage who have used more than once a year		
	<i>Total</i>	<i>Police</i>	<i>Law</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Police</i>	<i>Law</i>
Alcohol	69.3	75.0	66.0	90.0	88.5	96.6
Caffeine* (Coffee or tea)	80.7	74.0	84.8	90.0	84.4	91.5
Nonprescription analgesics	23.6	15.6	28.3	87.8	87.5	87.4
Tobacco	30.8	29.2	31.7	40.0	35.4	42.6
Antihistamines	3.0	2.0	3.6	21.8	21.9	21.8
Marijuana	3.0	1.0	4.2	11.2	2.1	16.5
Sedatives	0.8	0.0	1.2	11.9	5.2	12.7
Tranquilizers	0.4	0.0	0.6	6.6	5.2	5.5
Stimulants	0.4	0.0	0.6	1.9	1.0	3.3
Hallucinogens	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.0	1.0	1.9
Cocaine	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.0	0.0	1.2
Opiates	0.4	0.0	0.6	0.4	0.0	0.6

\*  $p < .05$

+  $p < .001$

TABLE 2: COMPARISON OF MEAN SCORE OF POLICE AND LAW  
STUDENTS ON THE ATTITUDES TOWARD ALCOHOLISM  
INSTRUMENT

	<i>Psycho- logical Etiology</i>	<i>Social Rejection</i>	<i>Physical Genetic</i>	<i>Humani- tarian</i>	<i>Moral Weakness</i>	<i>Medical</i> <sup>****</sup> <i>Illness</i>
	X (SD)	X(SD)	X(SD)	X(SD)	X(SD)	$\bar{X}$ (SD)
<b>Year in School</b>						
First N = 111*	12.0(1.8)	10.2(2.4)	10.1(1.9)#	11.8(2.3)+	7.8(2.7)	10.4(2.1)
Final N = 151*	11.8(2.0)	10.3(2.3)	9.0(2.0)	12.4(2.0)	7.7(2.5)	9.9(2.3)
<b>Religious Commitment</b>						
Very N = 140*	12.1(1.9)	10.7(2.3)+	9.8(2.0)+	11.8(2.0)+	8.5(2.6)	10.8(2.1) +
Not N = 122*	11.8(2.0)	9.8(2.3)	9.2(2.1)	12.4(2.2)	7.1(2.4)	9.5(2.2)
<b>Course</b>						
Police N = 96*	12.2(2.1)	10.4(2.2)	9.9(2.1)	11.8(2.1)	8.2(2.6)+	10.6(2.1)+
Law N = 166*	11.8(1.8)	10.2(2.4)	9.4(2.0)	12.3(2.1)	7.5(2.5)	9.8(2.3)
<b>Total</b> N = 262*	11.9(2.0)	10.3(2.3)	9.5(2.0)	12.1(2.1)	7.7(2.6)	10.0(2.2)

\*Total possible number  
of students in each  
category.

+ p < .05

# p < .001

TABLE 3: COMPARISON of GROUPS AS TO THE IMPORTANCE OF DRUG AND ALCOHOL INFORMATION AND PREPAREDNESS TO MANAGE DRUG AND ALCOHOL ABUSE PROBLEMS (in percent)

	<i>Importance of Alcohol Ed.</i>	<i>Importance of Drug Ed,</i>	<i>Prepared to Manage Alcohol</i>	<i>Prepared to Manage Drug</i>
<b>Year in School</b>				
First N = 111	63.0+	60.7	43.9+	43.9
Final N = 151	47.3	54.0	28.4	35.8
<b>Religious Commitment</b>				
Very N = 140	57.6	58.1	40.7	41.9
Not N = 122	51.1	52.9	30.1	37.2
<b>Course</b>				
Police N = 96	83.7*	82.3*	56.3*	60.4*
Law N = 166	36.0	38.4	21.9	26.3
<b>Total</b> N = 262	52.4	55.1	34.9	39.2

+ P < .05

\* P < .001

